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RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000923

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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SUBJECT: ARRESTS, INTIMIDATION SUCCESSFULLY QUASH PROTESTS

REF: ABUJA 852

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¶1. Despite harsh rhetoric by Nigerian opposition candidates, labor leaders, and civil society, promises of mass action to protest the Nigerian elections have largely gone unfilled. Labor rallies were held on May 1 (reftel), but were tightly controlled and largely peaceful. Civil society issued a 14-day "ultimatum" demanding cancellation of the April polls, but leaders have yet to specify what will occur when their ultimatum runs out on May 15. Though the lack of popular protests is due in part to public exhaustion, poverty, and apathy, it also results from government attempts to quash protest through threats, intimidation, and in some cases detentions.

¶2. A few days before the presidential and governorship elections, opposition candidates and their influential supporters were detained with the aim of breaking the ranks of the opposition groups. In most of the states where violence arose from rejection of the poll results, security agents exploited the opportunity to attack and detain chieftains and key members of the opposition groups. In some cases, rather than detaining leaders, security agents harassed them at their offices, homes or in public places with threats of arrest and possible use of force if protests were successfully organized.

¶3. There were reports of arrests and intimidation across all six geopolitical zones, but in Ondo, Osun, Edo, Abia, Katsina, Benue, Ebonyi, Ogun, Oyo, Kwara, Sokoto, Kaduna, Kogi, Adamawa, Taraba, and Nasarawa hundreds of Nigerians belonging to opposition groups were detained by the police. While some have been released, others are still in custody. In Abia State for instance, the People's Progressive Alliance (PPA) candidate and current Governor-elect Theodore Orji was arrested before the election and remains in police custody. On May 1, at least six hundred Nigerians were detained by the police for trying to protest the recent polls and eighty were arrested. A contact who was detained but later released by the State Security Service (SSS) opined that the security agents were desperate and jittery about any attempt to hold a protest rallies.

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EXAMPLES OF INTIMIDATION, DETENTIONS

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¶4. On April 15 the ANPP governorship candidate in Kaduna State and other key officials of the party were arrested and detained by the security agents. Some of them were released after the April 21 presidential elections.

¶5. Security agents forcefully gained entrance to the transmission studio of AIT, a privately-owned television station, on April 16, forcing staff to stop the transmission of a documentary program that was critical to President Obasanjo and the ruling PDP. In place of the documentary, a tape conveying campaign activities of PDP presidential candidate Yar'adua and highlights of President Obasanjo's achievements were played. Campaign activities of other leading opposition candidates like Muhammadu Buhari were not broadcast, although some paid ads for minor candidates were mixed in with the pro-Obasanjo programming.

¶6. The Action Congress (AC) gubernatorial candidate in Edo state and former president of the Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC), Adams Oshiomhole, was arrested on April 16, shortly after violent protests broke out in the state over the conduct of the gubernatorial elections. Protestors insisted that Oshimole had won the election, in spite of a INEC declaration of the election as a PDP victory. Oshimole was arrested, reportedly for saying that the people had rights to reclaim and protect their mandate, and he was subsequently released.

¶7. On April 17, Chief Solomon Ewuga, ANPP governorship candidate in Nasarawa State was invited to Abuja and detained on the orders of the Inspector General of Police Sunday Ehindero following communal violence arising from the gubernatorial elections. He was released after the April 21 polls. On the same day, key supporters of the Democratic Peoples Party (DPP) in Sokoto State were detained by the

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police, some of whom were not released until after the presidential elections. Earlier on, the state party chairman and other major supporters were harassed by security agents who falsely claimed the officials were wanted by the EFCC. Several opposition party supporters were also arrested in Kogi State for allegedly igniting violent protests against the governorship elections. On April 18, the ANPP governorship candidate in Ebonyi State, Chief Ogbonnaya Onu, was beaten and arrested. His arrest came after his supporters protested the results of the governorship elections, and the protest allegedly paralyzed activities in the state. Onu was released after the presidential elections.

¶8. Security agents in Ilorin, capital of Kwara State, detained leaders of state branch of Action Congress (AC) on April 22 for allegedly recruiting party thugs to set ablaze the residence of state electoral commissioner. The AC chieftains included Prince Sunday Fagbemi, state party chairman, and Barrister Bolaji Edun, state party secretary. Sources said both politicians are still in custody. A source also confirmed the arrest of other members of several opposition groups in the state.

¶9. The Federal Government banned protests and political rallies throughout Nigeria. On April 29, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sunday Ehindero told the media in Abuja that he had instructed all his state commissioners "not to grant permits for political rally or procession - any rally held without police permit will be dispersed forcefully. We shall use the tear gas to disperse them (demonstrators) and if it warrants using more than minimum force to disperse them, we shall use it." (NOTE: There is no legal requirement for police permit for public demonstrations.)

¶10. On April 30, Emmanuel Ezeazu, the Secretary General of the Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE) was detained and

questioned in Abuja by the SSS operatives in connection with a planned demonstration against the elections on the Labor Day (May 1). He was asked to sign an agreement not organize or participate in any protest, but he declined to do so. He was released on May 1.

¶11. Opposition politicians and labor activists were assaulted and/or detained throughout Nigeria before and during the nation-wide Labor Day celebrations May 1. Some labor leaders and opposition groups had vowed to use the Labor Day to protest against the elections. Press reports indicate that Abuja police detained at least 235 demonstrators, while at least 50 were detained in Daura (Katsina) for holding anti-election placards and chanting slogans. Police reportedly used force to disperse protests in Lagos, Katsina and Benue states, saying that the demonstrations were illegal as they had not received official police permission. Thousands of demonstrators wearing black t-shirts and carrying placards tried to join a May Day rally at Onikan Stadium in Lagos. According to civil society activists, police arrived in large numbers and harassed and beat the crowd. ANPP Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari was threatened by political thugs and security services to prevent his attendance at the rally. An estimated 80 demonstrators were arrested at the venue. Other reports indicate at least 200 potential demonstrators were detained in and around the area.

¶12. Agents of the State Security Service (SSS) beat the Presidential Candidate of the National Conscience Party, Dr. Osagie Obayuwana, as he and his followers tried to take part in a Labor Day celebration May 1 at Ogbe Stadium in Benin City, Edo state. Obayuwana and Chief Dide Adodo, an official of the Labour Party, were subsequently arrested by SSS and told that the day "was for workers, not for civil society organizations." At another labor rally in Ondo State, journalist Dare Folorunso was beaten to unconsciousness, reportedly by Assistant Police Commissioner Mr. Joshua Mumbo and 10 others. When some members of the crowd protested the assault, police threatened to shoot them.

¶13. The Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) officially petitioned Inspector General of Police Sunday Ehindero over the arrests

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and brutalization of its members and other activists during the May 1 workers' day celebrations. In particular, the NLC condemned the activities of some policemen such as Mumbo, who personally assaulted journalist Dare Folorunsho.

¶14. The AC gubernatorial candidate in Osun State, Rauf Aregbesola, told a leading Nigerian newspaper on May 3 that over 200 opposition supporters were arrested or detained by the security agents in addition to the "scores of innocent citizens" killed during the elections. A riot broke out in Osun state immediately after INEC had declared PDP as the winner of the governorship election. "There is a serious case of human rights abuse by the Osun State government in collaboration with the police. As I am talking to you, over 200 of our people were arrested and put into various jails in Osun State for supporting AC," Argebesola said.

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COMMENT

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¶15. The laundry list of incidents above is typical of events around Nigeria since the election, and most such incidents go unreported. Though some commentators are surprised at the absence of mass protests given the widespread public condemnation of the election, it is clear from the incidents above that organizing public protest is difficult and can be dangerous.

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